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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: review of further implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by AARP, Congregations of St. Joseph, Franciscans International, International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, and International Movement ATD Fourth World, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Christian Children's Fund, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Elizabeth Seton Federation, Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants, International Association of Charities, International Association of Schools of Social Work, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, and VIVAT International, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The Eradication of Poverty Requires Empowerment, Participation and Local Community Ownership

The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration recommended that people living in poverty should be fully involved in "the setting of targets and in the design, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national strategies and programs for poverty eradication and community-based development, and ensuring that such programs reflect their priorities." Many recent UN Conferences including Copenhagen +5, the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances and the World Assembly on Ageing as well as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues draw attention to the special needs of marginalized people who live in poverty. When people suffering the effects of poverty are consulted as local stakeholders in development and are engaged as partners in the eradication of poverty, they take an active role in development projects. We are concerned that persons living in poverty and those who are marginalized -- including the aged, women, the girl child, indigenous peoples and victims of racism, xenophobia and related intolerances -- themselves participate in development projects from their very inception. Here are some examples:

- A group of very poor youth in East Africa traveled from the fish market where they worked, to a nearby primary school, where they helped to renovate a school for blind children. For some, this was their first encounter with education, and in a testament to the impression made, one youth returned to teach at the school as an adult. Thus the volunteers of an International NGO learned that those who live in extreme poverty have the energy and the ability to mobilize around projects that improve lives – both in their own community and in the greater world.

- In New York, homeless persons founded the organization *Picture the Homeless* five years ago, and now it is still managed entirely by people who are homeless. They struggle for the defense of their human rights, for justice and respect, and express their appeal to the rest of society in these terms: *Don't talk about us; talk with us.* Having a meaningful input into the project enabled them to express their views and demands, with no fear of consequences.

We must recognize that we all share in equal dignity and rights. Such recognition encourages people suffering from the effects of poverty to actively participate in community development. Respect for one another's culture, especially that of indigenous peoples and other victims of racism, supports the full use of the knowledge, skills and resourcefulness that people who experience poverty have acquired. For example, in an Indian Ocean country, an NGO met many children who often arrived at the hospital too dehydrated to be saved. Cultural differences between local health-care professionals and parents revealed themselves. The health-care workers assumed that because children were dying, parents didn't love their children; in reality, the parents felt more comfortable and in control in their homes than in hospitals. Professionals and the local community worked together to overcome these barriers through outreach and mutual education, in turn, creating a strong trusting friendship as equal partners in the protection of the health of children. This example indicates that working together with people to address their specific needs is essential to poverty eradication, that partnership between local communities and professionals is a key to better health for families in extreme poverty.

An obvious example of the value of drawing on first hand expertise in developing poverty programs is that of Brazil's president who had suffered hunger in his early years. Based on his experiences, President Luiz Ignatio Lula planned and proposed the "Action against Hunger and Poverty" program recently presented to Heads of State at the UN in New York on the 20th September 2004.

Recognizing that we are all part of the human family with equal dignity and rights, we recommend at the local level that government programs and policies:

- Involve those who live in poverty in assessing needs and analyzing root causes.

- Listen to and acknowledge people who have the experience of living in poverty, as the relevant stakeholders in poverty eradication programs. Indicators for programs in poverty eradication should include active participation, participatory consultation, equal access, constant training and powerful partnerships.

- Include local stakeholders as equal partners in development. Development works when local communities are the subjects rather than objects of development activities and when those most often marginalized are vitally involved in the work of development.

- Encourage and assist people to participate in the activities of the community by facilitating their access to basic services (health, education, justly paid jobs, housing, etc). Development that targets social sectors empowers people with self-confidence and skills and breaks the intergenerational cycle of poverty and dependence.

- Include people with the least opportunity such as youth, minorities, elderly persons, women, the girl child, and indigenous peoples; no social group or individuals should be excluded as having nothing to share.

- Involve women in development projects from the earliest stages, as they are key decision makers in local communities.

- Provide medical coverage and home care for those who are aged or disabled, as well as transportation to medical facilities, especially in developing countries.

- Provide social programs such as community centers that would link communities, including youth, elderly persons, women, the girl child, and indigenous peoples with information.

We recommend that government programs and policies at the national level:

- Define the real capital of the country as human capital, and invest sufficient resources to develop this capital as a fundamental of development.

- Shift the focus of attention of government programs from the middle and upper classes who could afford to pay for services, towards the fast growing constituency who cannot pay for the most basic services.

- Include disaggregated data, by age, ethnic group and gender for all policy evaluation and formation.

- Amend existing polices and develop new ones to ensure health benefits, nutrition, and other economic and social protection for youth, elderly, women, the girl child, indigenous peoples, victims of racism and xenophobia, immigrants and other marginalized groups.

We recommend that programs and policies at the Global level:

- Recognize that some countries have been stripped by developed countries of their most basic resources: natural resources, skilled workers, life resources like water, land and forest, to the impoverishment of those countries and the enrichment of others. A clear, effective, long-term plan of just restitution must be made and implemented immediately.

- Focus on the distribution of wealth. Those countries that have gained the most from globalization are morally responsible for sharing their financial resources, not as "charity," but as justice to repair the great damage done and honor the commitment to equity. Countries must fulfill their promise that 0.7% of GNP will be given in Official Development Assistance.

- Include the interest, perspective and participation of those suffering from conditions of extreme poverty in projects financed by UN Agencies and intergovernmental agencies including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

When people living in poverty and those who are marginalized themselves participate in all phases of national strategies and programs for development, and when countries that have gained the most from globalization honor their commitment to give 0.7% of GNP in Official Development Assistance, then poverty eradication will move from dream to reality.